



THE BASIS CRSP PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

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Seeking rural prosperity

BY HELPING MAKE MARKETS WORK FOR ALL, BASIS CRSP seeks to improve the quality of life for people in rural areas of the developing world. With a cutting edge and innovative research program, BASIS produces impacts through its publications, training, education, capacity building, and informed policy recommendations that help facilitate broadly based and sustainable economic growth.

More and more people around the world face hunger and malnutrition even as food supplies are abundant. Aid programs that deliver food for emergencies can be of short-term benefit, but there remains a critical need to prevent more people from falling into poverty and to find ways for those who already are poor to escape poverty permanently.

Strategies for accumulating and protecting assets are important. Also there must be sound strategies for recovering from disasters such as drought, war, and HIV/AIDS, avoiding the degradation of one's own resources and those shared with others, and participating in the institutions that manage resources and other assets. BASIS seeks to provide these strategies through a coherent research program that addresses a basic cause of chronic poverty: lack of access or unequal access to factors of production such as land, water, labor, and finance, as well as to services, information, and market opportunities.



Rural prosperity is the BASIS CRSP goal.

(Photo by A. Peter Castro.)

Solutions are not as simple as linking the poor to rural factor markets. Often these markets are missing or imperfect, leaving non-market institutions and rules to broker resource allocation and access. Missing and imperfect factor markets often underlie problems of food insecurity, poverty, and unsustainable growth. In such an environment, a rural household's ability to access,

accumulate, and effectively utilize resources is constrained, and people often resort to unproductive accumulation strategies. Increasing numbers of households find themselves unable to respond to economic opportunities that emerge while also lacking effective strategies for coping with economic downturns, disasters, and changes brought about by political, social, or economic restructuring.

Methods for helping the rural poor often are regionally specific, yet lessons learned in one area may in fact provide key elements to solutions in other areas. A well-balanced examination across regions of rural factor markets and their role in enhancing or constraining growth can inform policy that seeks to foster rural economies in which growth is a sustainable foundation for broad rural prosperity.

Developing innovative solutions

In 1996, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched BASIS—a collaborative research support program that examines the interactions and inter-relationships of land, water, labor, and financial factor markets and the impacts of policy or policy reform in helping improve access to and efficiency of factor markets. Phase I of the program ended in September 2001. At that time, USAID awarded the University of Wisconsin-Madison an additional five-year grant to extend the research to 2006.

BASIS Phase II is comprised of individual research projects in multiple regions of the world designed to have policy impact both locally and globally. The projects emerge from a competitive process that selects the top proposals submitted in response to a call for work on pressing global constraints to growth. Projects are intended first to understand the constraints to development and then to deliver innovative and creative policy solutions.

Although each project focuses on a country or a regional context, BASIS looks for lessons and policy innovations that can be applied worldwide. Initially, the following five primary research projects were supported; each runs three years and receives approximately \$200,000 per year in core funds.

1. **Input Market Constraints upon the Growth of Russian Agriculture:** Land, Labor, Capital, and other Inputs under Alternate Economic Reform Policies
2. **Institutional Innovations to Improve Equity Sharing under Privatization and Farm Restructuring:** Helping Land Reform Beneficiaries Gain Access to Land and Financial Resources in Central Asia and Southern Africa

3. **Institutional Dimensions of Water Policy Reform in Southern Africa:** Addressing Critical Water-Land Intersections in Broadening Access to Key Factors of Production

4. **Rural Markets, Natural Capital, and Dynamic Poverty Traps in East Africa**

5. **Assets, Cycles, and Livelihoods:** Addressing Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa and Central America

Three smaller projects were added in 2002.

6. **Credit Reporting Bureaus and the Deepening of Financial Services for the Rural Poor in Latin America**

7. **The Structure and Performance of Rural Financial Markets and the Welfare of the Rural Poor:** A Comparative Study in Peru and Mexico

8. **The Long-Run Effects of Access to Financial Services on Asset Accumulation, Economic Mobility, and the Evolution of Wellbeing:** Revisiting Agricultural Commercialization in Bukidnon, 1984-2003

Together, these eight projects target imperfections in factor markets and other resource allocation institutions that result in the following constraints to broadly based and sustainable growth:

Global Constraint 1: *Ineffective agricultural resource use in post-reform economies*

Global Constraint 2: *Unsustainable use of environmentally sensitive resources*

Global Constraint 3: *Poverty and food insecurity traps*

As detailed below, each BASIS project addresses one or more of these constraints in innovative ways with the goal of providing policymakers with solutions in specific regions for specific populations while also establishing and maintaining a dialogue among researchers and policymakers that allows for synthesis across regions and a broader understanding of the constraints.

Global Constraint 1: Ineffective agricultural resource use in post-reform economies

In many regions, a knowledge base for understanding how factor market constraints stunt and misshape economic growth does not exist. In eastern Europe and central Asia, research based on aggregate statistics reveals poor post-reform performance; however, detailed

farm and market-level studies have yet to be undertaken that would identify the specific constraints underlying disappointing macroeconomic records.

BASIS Project “**Input Market Constraints upon the Growth of Russian Agriculture**” is producing reliable information on the progress, performance, and constraints to reform. Today, in Russia, many farm laborers find it nearly impossible to sustain a livelihood, let alone to realize a profit that might allow for investment in their farming enterprise or simply as a buffer against future crises. As much as 80% of the large former collective farms may be insolvent. Data suggest that the smaller private family farms that sprang up in the past decade may be more efficient yet nonetheless have widespread problems of unprofitability.

Certain inputs like fertilizer and fuels may be overabundant on some of the larger, former cooperative farms and therefore go to waste, while these same valuable inputs are unavailable to the small, private farmers. A shortage of skilled labor and an oversupply of unskilled labor throughout the agricultural sector might also contribute to the unprofitability of farms. Yet policies that increase productivity, output growth, and farm income must at the same time account for the impact on people's lives.

At the core of the BASIS project in Russia is a major survey of farms that generates primary data about the situation. The project brings together a team of leading experts from Russia, the United States and other countries to debate hypotheses about the state of land, labor, input, and financial markets in Russian agriculture and to devise ways the survey can produce more consistent and accurate information. Collaboration of this depth and at this level, particularly on politically sensitive issues such as land resources and agricultural output, already represents a significant impact. Analytical methods being developed by the collaborating researchers will help quantify the extent to which factor market constraints

prevent Russian agriculture from functioning efficiently and profitably. The goal is to identify the most critical constraints upon which policy should focus.

IN SOME REGIONS, knowledge about how factor market constraints stunt and misshape economic growth is well-developed. The challenge is to consolidate and use this knowledge to find coherent policy reform models.

BASIS Project “**Institutional Innovations to Improve Equity Sharing under Privatization and Farm Restructuring**” builds on established knowledge about the constraints that limit effective resource use by smallholders. During periods of political and economic transition,

rural people often are unable to use land resources productively. In some countries transitioning away from collective farms, it may not be feasible to privatize land and other assets; therefore, many people find themselves as co-owners of these resources. Such enterprises face enormous constraints to growth in the Kyrgyz Republic, where, for example, a plant that produces fruit juice may not be able to obtain credit to purchase bottles in order to distribute the final product. This is because many businesses remain heavily indebted to the state, while at the same time the owners are wary of taking on extra investors as a means of raising capital.

South Africa too is struggling with land reforms, though clearly the economic and

historical context is very different from that found in the Kyrgyz Republic. Nonetheless, South Africa has seen some successes with farm worker equity schemes, and these may provide useful lessons. When a farmworker sees benefits to exchanging his or her cattle for equity shares or even land from a farmowner, such an incentive can contribute to the overall reform effort of redistributing farmland and wealth and improving agricultural production. Identifying the institutional practices that best



Field interviews of households help BASIS gather data on land use. This interview took place in a rural community near Addis Ababa.
(Photo by Michael Roth.)

allow individuals to successfully co-own enterprises can highlight directions for facilitating reform and redistribution efforts in many countries and regions.

The BASIS project's case studies on enterprises in the Kyrgyz Republic and South Africa are yielding information on best practices behind successful attempts to share and co-own resources through equity schemes. The project will apply these best practices to the design or redesign of one or more equity sharing enterprises that will be a model for assessing how organizational and institutional innovations can improve performance, measuring not only financial health but also environmental sustainability and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups. Analysis will reinforce understanding of the specific practices that positively impact performance of this type of enterprise.

Global Constraint 2: Unsustainable use of environmentally sensitive resources

Management of natural resources may become subject to institutional dissonance or incoherence. Contemporary policy discourse centers on two narratives: one of economic efficiency and one of democratic participation. In efforts to achieve these goals, many governments have decentralized the management of natural resources within their countries. Rather than leading to more efficiency and democratization, however, this restructuring in some cases has led to increased tension, conflict, and misuse of resources.

BASIS Project “**Institutional Dimensions of Water Policy Reform in Southern Africa**” explores this situation where policy toward river basin management is subject to sometimes conflicting institutional impulses toward both economic efficiency and democratic participation. In some southern African countries, management responsibility over a key natural resource—water—is being shifted from governments to multiple users in the private sector. Formal irrigation schemes are being transferred to farmers organized into water user associations, putting more responsibility into the hands of individuals. Meanwhile, “informal” irrigation is estimated to cover even more area than the formal schemes. In both the formal and informal irrigation schemes, water is a scarce factor of production and competition over its use and control is increasing. In this atmosphere, social status and power relations within the community may give unfair advantages to some users.

In Malawi, a smallfarmer can greatly benefit by having a plot near a river or streambed, and yet the way he or she

uses the water and the land it irrigates may be incompatible with another farmer nearby. In the new decentralized environment, there may be no clear way to avoid disputes or resolve them equitably. In fact, there may be multiple, overlapping institutions and policies governing the situation. Policymakers need a fuller picture of how proposed land and water policies interact and affect efficient, sustainable, and equitable use of resources.

The BASIS project in southern Africa is finding that conflict due to problems of access to credit, pricing, unspecific boundaries, and inconsistent and overlapping reforms may be increasing in the decentralized atmosphere. Also, in certain regions, the new policies have not accounted for traditional descent and residence patterns. BASIS is providing better understanding of where policies that were drafted separately may need to be reconciled. The project also is detailing the extent to which management institutions can assure sustainability of the natural resource base while remaining faithful to democratic participation and inclusion.

THE SAME FACTOR MARKET and resource allocation constraints that inhibit productive use of agricultural resources also may constrain the use of environmentally sensitive resources. In post-reform environments, sustaining the productivity of natural resources may require significant investment and trading off current wellbeing for future wellbeing. Also, an individual's use or misuse of the resource directly affects others who depend on the same resource.

BASIS Project “**Rural Markets, Natural Capital, and Dynamic Poverty Traps in East Africa**” explores the hypothesis that missing financial markets contribute to a poverty trap that makes it difficult for poor households to accumulate productive assets and improve their livelihood over time. Most of the very poorest people throughout the world must sustain themselves through agriculture. For many, poverty is not a temporary situation but an enduring trap. Lacking strategies to escape poverty, people often resort to farming techniques that degrade the very resources upon which they depend, thus almost eliminating any hope for gaining investment opportunities needed to escape these conditions and improve the productivity of their land.

In central Kenya, tea farmers have opportunities to obtain fertilizers through a credit-in-kind system with tea processors. Therefore, these farmers are able not only to keep productivity high but also to maintain soil quality. Many coffee farmers in the region do not have the same

credit opportunities and would like to shift from coffee production into something currently more remunerative, such as tea or dairy. Yet such a shift requires an initial investment and knowledge of how to make the new opportunity productive. Farmers who lack the cash or knowledge are forced to continue growing coffee without inputs such as fertilizers while inexorably depleting the value of the soil. Situations such as these challenge policymakers to find ways for people to avoid the downward spiral of poverty and resource degradation.

Once caught in this trap, households may have little choice but to deplete soils and otherwise draw down the natural resource base simply in order to survive day by day. By collecting a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, BASIS is creating a multi-dimensional picture of households that are vulnerable to cycles of poverty and resource degradation. The goal is analyze these data on welfare dynamics to explore how these relate to associated changes in soil quality and land and livestock productivity. BASIS's analysis will provide policymakers with the information needed to help small-holders sustain their resource base.

Global Constraint 3: Poverty and food insecurity traps

It is increasingly clear that there are persistently or chronically poor people caught in poverty traps for whom the passage of time offers no relief. It is one thing to make markets work better for the less well-off in the short term. It is even more powerful to make markets work so that people can use time to enhance their assets, capabilities, and food security.

In addition to targeting Global Constraint 2, BASIS Project “**Rural Markets, Natural Capital, and Dynamic Poverty Traps in East Africa**” also confronts the issue of how missing financial markets and the fixed costs of investment create poverty traps. Investment opportunities that offer poor people the chance to improve their livelihoods over time are themselves subject to significant fixed costs. The lack of financial markets to help poor people reach the critical minimum investment size means that households may become stuck in unprofitable savings and investment strategies.

BASIS's preliminary analysis of the data collected suggests that vertically integrated systems enable small farmers to transition into more remunerative situations, larger farms are better able to take advantage of emerging opportunities, and resource access is key in places

where crucial inputs cannot be obtained through market mechanisms. The connections BASIS has established with local and national policymakers have allowed it to begin to effectively deliver preliminary findings on issues of education, output market structure, resource access, and farm size as it relates to access to markets and profitability.

WHEN HOUSEHOLDS FACE a shared “shock,” the prices of productive assets tend to move with household income so that when income is low, asset prices also are low. In this circumstance, and in the absence of insurance markets, it is difficult for a household to cope with shocks by drawing down on stocks of the productive assets. For poor people who are exposed to subsistence risk, their only viable strategy may be to build up buffer stocks even though the rates of return on such stocks can be very low or even negative, as in the case of grain stores. Poverty is thus reproduced over time by low wealth and by low realized returns on wealth. As when there are large fixed costs to investment, the result of missing financial markets may be poverty traps.

BASIS Project “**Assets Cycles, and Livelihoods**” focuses on the role of shocks in creating poverty traps and explores who gets caught in risk-induced poverty traps. Partly as a result of increasing poverty, nearly 40% of agricultural land throughout the world now is seriously degraded. This problem is growing in many areas, especially in areas of Africa and central America. Natural disasters such as drought and hurricanes, common in these regions, can further deplete resources and the meager assets and savings of those who depend on them. Severe food insecurity is a grave danger in regions prone to these climatic shocks.

A drought in Ethiopia is not an unusual occurrence, yet what is alarming is the fact that few of the rural poor find ways to cope with these conditions. A hurricane can be as devastating as drought, yet in the wake of Hurricane Mitch, rural communities in Honduras seem to have better opportunities to avoid being trapped in poverty as a result of the shock. A Honduran household's relatively good access to factor markets along with more nonfarm opportunities for generating income contributes to its ability to recover. Studies of communities in regions prone to shocks can document the relationship between factor markets and the differing ability of households to recover from cycles of shocks and accumulation.

BASIS builds on extensive quantitative household panel data sets from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Honduras that document both shocks and patterns of asset accumulation

and deaccumulation over time periods in which households have suffered severe climatic shocks. Matching these quantitative data with careful qualitative exploration of the household cycles of shocks and accumulation is leading to a unique understanding of the role risk plays in keeping poor households poor in the face of imperfect factor markets. The goal is to find ways for these households to avoid dependency upon relief aid and instead find viable methods for retaining assets and improving access to markets as they recover from natural disasters such as droughts or hurricanes.

IN OCTOBER 2002, BASIS funded three new research projects that add a dimension to BASIS's work on the global constraints to growth, and will increase knowledge about rural finance markets and their links to other factor markets. The projects also deepen BASIS's work in Latin America and Asia. The first two projects help BASIS address Global Constraints 1 and 3. The third project adds to understanding of Global Constraint 3.

BASIS Project “Credit Reporting Bureaus and the Deepening of Financial Services for the Rural Poor in Latin America” analyzes how the emergence of credit reporting systems might overcome the poor's reluctance to leverage meager assets in order to gain access to capital. The goal of the project is to help guide best practices in the legal and regulatory formulation of credit reporting systems by anticipating how these systems will transfer access to credit for different classes of borrowers and how they will affect competition among rural credit lenders.

BASIS Project “The Structure and Performance of Rural Financial Markets and the Welfare of the Rural Poor” investigates the degree to which recently liberalized rural financial markets in Peru and Mexico meet the needs of the rural poor. The project will deliver an assessment of the impact financial market access has on household welfare, production decisions, and the ability to accumulate assets over time.

BASIS Project “The Long-run Effects of Access to Financial Services on Asset Accumulation, Economic Mobility, and the Evolution of Wellbeing” studies the differential effects of credit constraints on households exposed to commercial agriculture and those relying on food crop production. The goal is to understand how access to rural financial services affects patterns of physical and human capital accumulation, economic mobility, and wellbeing over a long period of time.



Washing corn to make tortillas. Unlike this household in rural El Salvador, most rural poor are unable to access credit for investment in either farm and nonfarm endeavors. New BASIS projects study factors that encourage or prevent poor households from participating in rural financial markets.

(Photo by Danielle Hartmann.)

COMBINED, THE EIGHT PROJECTS in the BASIS research program provide a multi-faceted picture of the constraints to growth in the rural sector. Already, BASIS has begun delivering findings that will help bolster policy solutions to remove, relax, or avoid those constraints.

Delivering impact

The BASIS goal is to find ways for people in the rural agricultural sector to realize prosperity. The foundation by which BASIS can begin to reach this goal is its comprehensive and innovative research program that attempts to overcome three global constraints to growth. From this foundation, the method for achieving rural prosperity is to connect the research findings to key audiences of host country policymakers, international policymakers, and the global academic community. With the understanding that

research is only as effective as how findings are communicated, BASIS uses a range of methods for delivering results and recommendations that strengthen existing policies or lead to new policies.

At the core of each project is a strong collaborative relationship between principal investigators from the host country and the United States. This allowed BASIS to create an impressive network of some of the best academic institutions in the US and abroad, as well as drawing into the program “action groups” of key institutions and organizations throughout the world that have a direct influence on local policy.

Immediate outputs already being generated come in the form of background papers, small seminars, education, training, and policy dialogue. BASIS projects are training enumerators and graduate students, conducting study tours and workshops, and providing classroom and other types of education. Since 1996, BASIS has provided short-term training to over 1,300 individuals and supported degree training for 62 BA, MA, and Ph.D. students. In this way, BASIS engages and strengthens the skills of those responsible for designing and implementing policies in particular contexts.

In the past six years, BASIS has produced more than 250 outputs. BASIS researchers contribute to the academic literature through peer-reviewed journals, books, and papers presented at their professional conferences. BASIS research appears not only in top international journals but also in regional and local journals, with the result that BASIS contributes to strengthening the academic communities in countries where it works.

BASIS findings, both the longer, academic outputs and the shorter, policy-oriented outputs, are made widely available to a large audience of researchers and policymakers. The ongoing series of *BASIS Briefs* is an important tool for policymakers in forming policy in their country or region, as well as for those responsible for setting the overall tone of development policy—including USAID, the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations, regional development banks, and other donors. Each BASIS project produced an initial *Brief* that summarized a particular research problem and ways the project will address it. *Briefs* in the coming years will continue to deliver findings, identify important policy implications, and suggest directions for further research or policy formulation both at the local and global level.

BASIS Briefs in 2002

No. 5. “Building Assets for Sustainable Recovery and Food Security,” by Peter D. Little, Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed, Michael Carter, Michael Roth, and Workneh Negatu. January 2002.
<http://www.basis.wisc.edu/live/basbrief05.pdf>

No. 6. “Poverty Traps and Resource Degradation,” by Christopher B. Barrett, Lawrence E. Blume, John G. McPeak, Bart Minten, Festus Murithi, Bernard N. Okumu, Alice Pell, Frank Place, Jean Claude Randrianarisoa, and Jhon Rasambainarivo. January 2002.
<http://www.basis.wisc.edu/live/basbrief06.pdf>

No. 6-F. “Le piège de la pauvreté et la dégradation des ressources,” par Christopher B. Barrett, Lawrence E. Blume, John G. McPeak, Bart Minten, Festus Murithi, Bernard N. Okumu, Alice Pell, Frank Place Jean Claude Randrianarisoa, et Jhon Rasambainarivo. Octobre 2002.
<http://www.basis.wisc.edu/live/basbrief06f.pdf>

No. 7. “Constraints to Growth in Russian Agriculture,” by Bruce Gardner and Eugenia Serova. January 2002.
<http://www.basis.wisc.edu/live/basbrief07.pdf>

No. 8. “Innovating Institutions to Help Land Reform Beneficiaries,” by Mike Lyne and Michael Roth, with assistance from Malcolm Childress and Roman Mogilevsky. February 2002.
<http://www.basis.wisc.edu/live/basbrief08.pdf>

No. 9. “Promoting Equitable Access to Water Resources,” by Bill Derman, Anne Ferguson, and Pauline Peters. February 2002.
<http://www.basis.wisc.edu/live/basbrief09.pdf>

No. 10. “Helping Disadvantaged South Africans Access the Land Market: Past Performance and Future Policy,” by Mark Darroch and Mike Lyne. March 2002.
<http://www.wisc.edu/lrc/live/basbrief10.pdf>

No. 11. “Land Redistribution in Namibia and Zimbabwe,” by Ben Fuller, George Eiseb, Lovemore Rugube, and Walter Chambati. August 2002.
<http://www.wisc.edu/lrc/live/basbrief11.pdf>

No. 12. “Gender and Broadening Access to Land and Water in Southern Africa,” by Pauline E. Peters and Anne E. Ferguson, with input from Mark Darroch, Bill Derman, Ben Fuller, Francis Gonese, Michael Lyne, Wapu Mulwafu, Joel das Neves, Ragan Petrie, and Lovemore Rugube. August 2002.
<http://www.wisc.edu/lrc/live/basbrief12.pdf>

No. 13. “The BASIS CRSP Program: An Overview,” by BASIS CRSP. October 2002.
<http://www.basis.wisc.edu/live/basbrief13.pdf>



B A S I S B r i e f s

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Another method by which BASIS communicates findings, especially to policymakers, is through outreach activities. Two targeted policy conferences were solicited by USAID and will be held in 2003.

The “**Workshop on Land Policy, Administration and Management in the English Speaking Caribbean,**” held in March, will help identify and develop effective land policies and investment programs for the region. Through a forum that allows them to share practical experiences, stakeholders will then use the workshop to seek practical ways to translate broadly agreed upon principles into feasible national policies that respond to specific problems in the region.

“Paving the Way Forward: An International Conference on Best Practices in Rural Finance” will

be held in June to provide operational conclusions on the necessary policy environments and infrastructural supports, achievements of financial institution sustainability, and innovation in technologies for rural financial services. The conference will provide a forum to debate the latest concepts and current knowledge of rural financial markets and will culminate in donor and practitioner guidelines for policy and development.

A rural finance review is particularly timely and relevant for USAID, which recognizes that rural areas are critical for sustained economic growth and social stability in developing and transitional economies. Recommendations generated by the BASIS conference will help shape USAID’s future

agricultural strategy and programming guidance. In addition, the US Government has committed itself to halving world poverty by the year 2015. Reassessing USAID’s role in agriculture and rural finance could play a critical role in achieving this goal.

These two outreach activities are precursors to the comprehensive global *BASIS Policy Conferences* that will be held after the research projects have completed their third year of work. Each policy conference will be a major, international forum bringing together the entire range of BASIS audiences. The conferences will provide opportunities for capturing commonalities and innovations

among the projects and thus begin the process of synthesizing approaches to policy action.

The conferences will cut across regions and projects to draw out the global policy implications of BASIS research. The BASIS Director, USAID representative, and principal investigators from each project will have joint ownership over the conferences, each of which will

focus on one of the global constraints that structure the BASIS research agenda. Joint sponsorship for the events will be developed with key development organizations. The end result will be a book or a special issue of a general readership journal.

WITH A GOAL OF RURAL PROSPERITY for all, the BASIS research program consistently delivers findings to various key audiences who together can help make the goal a reality throughout many regions of the developing world.



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